03/08/24 BIG TECH

TSA Facial Recognition Is Being Rolled Out at More U.S. Airports + More

The Defender's Big Brother NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to governments' abuse of power, including attacks on democracy, civil liberties and use of mass surveillance. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.

By The Defender Staff

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TSA Facial Recognition Is Being Rolled Out at More U.S. Airports

Condé Nast Traveler reported:

> More airlines and airports are testing facial recognition technology that automates this process in a bid to decrease the time spent at ID checks and keep up with the growing demand for air travel in the US. Last week, United Airlines joined Delta Air Lines in testing facial recognition technology on PreCheck travelers in conjunction with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) through an initiative called TSA PreCheck Touchless Identity Solution.
>
> United and Delta passengers with TSA PreCheck can consent to the technology at seven U.S. airports: Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (DTW), Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL), Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), LaGuardia Airport (LGA), and John F.

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Kennedy International Airport (JFK) with Delta Air Lines, and at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) and O'Hare International Airport (ORD) with United Airlines. Clear, the $189-a-year membership that allows enrolled travelers to cut to the front of airport security lines, has also begun using facial recognition technology at its checkpoints.

Biometric technology is replacing the need for passports at the world's most modern airports.

The TSA explains on its site that the information is converted to an "anonymized format" before being encrypted and transferred over to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science & Technology Directorate (S&T) for a "temporary analysis," with the DHS deleting the data within 180 days.

Want to Hit Facebook Where It Really Hurts? Outlaw Its Harvesting of Our Data

The Sydney Morning Herald reported:

"Deprecate" seemed an odd word to use, didn't it? "We'll be deprecating Facebook news" declared Meta this week, as a way of announcing it would close its dedicated news tab in April.

The practical meaning of this is that Facebook will not renew its contracts with news organizations whereby it pays for the news content that appears on the site. That's obviously significant news for anyone who cares about journalism, but even so, I found myself stuck on the verb. So I looked it up.

Here, there's an overlap with the word's traditional meaning of belittling or disapproving of something. Turns out it's the perfect word for Facebook to use because at the center of its decision is one blunt calculation: that as far as Facebook content goes, news just isn't that valuable.

And so, in one country after another — the U.S., the U.K., Germany, France, Australia — where it has been forced to pay for this content, it has now concluded the price isn't worth paying. Facebook is quite literally belittling the worth of news.

'General Hospital' Actor Fired Over Vaccine Mandate Returns to Show: 'Just Feels Really Good'

FOX59 News reported:

More than two years after being removed from the ABC soap opera "General Hospital" following a dispute over the COVID-19 vaccine, actor Steve Burton has returned to the show.

Burton appeared on Monday's episode of "General Hospital," roughly one month after the actor teased his return in an Instagram video apparently filmed on the show's set.

Burton, who joined the show in 1992 as Jason Morgan, had first revealed to fans in November 2021 that the producers "let [him] go because of the vaccine mandate." He explained at the time that he had applied for medical and religious exemptions, but was denied.

Shortly before Burton left "General Hospital," the show parted ways with Ingo Rademacher, who had played Jasper "Jax" Jacks on the soap opera since 1996, for refusing to comply with the show's vaccine mandate. Rademacher later sued ABC over the mandate, but a Los Angeles judge sided with ABC in the case in June 2023.

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Meta Urged by U.S. States to Combat Facebook, Instagram Account Hijackings

Reuters reported:

> Forty U.S. states and Washington, D.C. called on Meta Platforms (META.O) to crack down on scammers who hijack Facebook and Instagram accounts, to address a "dramatic" surge in account takeovers.
>
> In a letter to Meta's chief lawyer, states led by New York Attorney General Letitia James said fraudsters are "winning the war and running rampant on Meta," after the company in November 2022 announced thousands of job cuts focused on security and privacy.
>
> The states said New York has since 2019 received a 1,000% increase in complaints about scammers who access accounts and change passwords, enabling them to read private messages and pose as actual users to deceive contacts and the public. The states urged Meta to spend more money to prevent account takeovers, including through increased staffing, and to work more closely with people whose accounts are hacked.
>
> In October, 41 states and Washington, D.C. sued Meta, claiming the company designed its platforms to addict children, damaging their mental health.

Senate Passes Bill to Compensate Americans Exposed to Radiation by the Government

Associated Press reported:

> The Senate passed legislation Thursday that would compensate Americans exposed to radiation by the government by renewing a law initially passed more than three decades ago.
>
> The bill by Sens. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., and Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., would expand the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act to include more people who believe that exposure caused their illnesses. While some Republicans have balked at the cost — an estimated $50 billion, according to Hawley's office — the senators have argued that the government is at fault and should step up.
>
> Hawley stood outside the Senate before the vote with advocates for the legislation, several of whom have been diagnosed with cancers or who have family members who have been diagnosed. He said it's "hard to look them in the eye" and say they were poisoned by their government, "but we're not going to be there for you."
>
> While it is difficult to prove definitively that the waste caused residents' illnesses, the advocates argue that there is more than enough evidence that it has sickened people in the area.

Potential TikTok Ban Clears Congressional Hurdle As Some Republicans Voice Opposition

The Daily Wire reported:

> A controversial bill that could completely ban the Chinese-owned social media app TikTok from being downloaded in the U.S. is headed to the House floor after a Congressional committee voted unanimously on Thursday to advance the legislation.
>
> The bill, introduced by Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI), passed the House Energy and Commerce Committee in a bipartisan vote of 50-0, Fox Business reported. The measure, titled the "Protecting Americans from

Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act," would require ByteDance, TikTok's Chinese parent company, to divest the social media app or face an outright ban in the U.S. It would also create a process for the executive branch of the federal government to ban apps in the future that are deemed a "national security" risk.

While the bill is supported by numerous GOP congressmen, including House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), some Republican lawmakers and former President Donald Trump have voiced their opposition to a total ban on TikTok.

COVID Lockdowns Had High Health, Economic Costs: Swedish Study

The Epoch Times reported:

Imposing restrictive lockdown measures during the COVID-19 pandemic led to higher excess mortality in such nations while also damaging their economies, according to a recent Swedish study.

Published in the Economic Affairs journal on Feb. 11, the study — which looked at the health and economic effects of COVID-19 lockdowns in Sweden — found that its less restrictive COVID-19 policies led to lower excess mortality compared to many European nations that imposed stronger lockdown rules. Sweden also suffered a lower negative impact on gross domestic product (GDP) growth during the pandemic period.

Many policymakers made two key mistakes, researchers concluded. "First, they introduced lockdowns that were too stringent and had negligible positive health effects despite the evidence available at the time pointing toward the limited benefits of such broad measures.

"Second, they responded to the downturn in economic activity with fiscal and monetary policies that were excessively expansionary."

How Tech Giants Must Change to Comply With Europe's New Regulations

The Hill reported:

Six of the largest tech companies will be forced to make changes to their products and services this week as Europe's new sweeping tech regulation largely goes into effect.

The European Union's Digital Markets Act dictates how platforms minimize self-preferencing and allow for inter-operability, meaning how they prioritize their services over rivals and how services operate between ones run by other companies, among other measures. Companies that fail to comply will face hefty fines.

Five of the six companies designated as "gatekeepers" are U.S.-based: Amazon, Apple, Facebook's parent company Meta, Google's parent company Alphabet, and Microsoft. The other is Chinese-based ByteDance, which owns TikTok. The gatekeepers are designated by having annual turnover equal to or more than 7.5 billion euros in each of the past three years and at least 45 million monthly active EU users.

The change comes after years of global momentum to hold massive tech firms accountable for actions that may have led to their dominance in the market. But this week marks a key milestone as the significant regulations that curtail practices the platforms have used for years go into effect.

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